

THE CHILDREN OF EDWARD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF L. MICHELANT.

(See Plate.)

DURING the last days of June, 1483, on a splendid morning, when the sun shone forth in all his brilliancy, a barge, richly decorated, emblazoned with the arms of England, and half enclosed by large silken hangings, slowly descended the course of the Thames. After having passed, amid the acclamations of the people crowded on the banks of the river, the distance between Westminster and the Tower of London, the yacht stopped near that state prison; and its curtains being opened, two individuals, whose station one would divine from the splendour of their habits, and the respect which surrounded them, landed, and ascended the steps which led to the entrance of the Tower.

Equal in rank, the noble personages offered in their appearance a perfect contrast; and no one, to see them, would have suspected that they were of the same race, and that the same blood coursed through their veins. The oldest had seen about thirty-five years; magnificent vestments poorly concealed the deformities of his ungraceful form; his physiognomy possessed at first sight the appearance of loyalty and freedom, but if one examined attentively his fixed features, his dull and uncertain air, his thin lips strangely pressed together, manifested dissimulation and cruelty; and the smile which at times animated his countenance, showed but a passing benevolence.

On the contrary, the younger of the two, who was still a child, displayed in all his actions his goodness of heart; his easy carriage was full of a rare elegance; the flowing locks of his light hair covered his

shoulders, and at sight of him one felt attracted towards him by the strongest sympathies; one loved at once his youth and his beauty, where shone with a pure joy the noble qualities of the heart. At their approach the doors of the Tower opened, the archers who filled the ante-room ranged themselves with respect, and the governor, after having humbly saluted them, guided them through numerous and dark passages. They crossed many courts, ascended to one of the higher stories, and finally passed into a vast saloon, where large and heavy bars of iron, and thick doors, tokens of captivity, were hidden under the luxury of decoration. When they entered, a youth of about twelve years, who, sitting near a high arched window, viewed with a melancholy air the waters of the Thames, in which the sun traced dancing ornaments of gold, arose precipitately, and, advancing towards the two noble visitors, pressed the younger in his arms, exclaiming—

“Richard! dear Richard! my dear, dear brother. I again see you, then.”

During some moments their sighs and tears alone expressed their emotion. Finally conquering his grief, the young prisoner turned himself towards the only witness of this scene, and said to him, with a calm dignity superior to his age—

“My lord, you have given me my brother, but however consoling may be his presence, if he should become, like myself, a captive in the Tower, I should regret having again seen him.”

“You a prisoner!” said he who was addressed,

with an air of hypocritical mildness, "dear nephew, can you harbour those unworthy suspicions, and ought the king of England to doubt that I have no other rule of conduct than the promotion of his interest?"

These were the last words that Richard of Gloucester addressed to his nephews, Edward V., king of England, already confined a month in the Tower, and Richard, duke of York, whom he had just carried off from the widow of Edward IV., in order to remain sole master of the lives of the legitimate heirs of the English crown. In going out, Gloucester threw on the children a subtle and malignant glance; and, finding in the ante-chamber of the apartment the governor, Blakenbury,

"Forget not to execute faithfully all the commands you may receive from me," said he, "and I will not be ungrateful."

On the bank of the Thames, Richard, Lord Protector of England, filled with a joy he in vain endeavoured to conceal, at the easy success of his designs, stepped into the royal yacht which attended him, and repaired to the parliament.

As soon as they were alone, the two brothers, Edward and Richard, again embraced. More than a month had they been separated, and their tenderness could only be satisfied by these sweet caresses. Finally they questioned each other, and, whatever might still be the inexperience of Edward, he could not doubt the fatal future which awaited them. To the joyous repartees of the hoping Richard, he sadly replied—

"It would be better to prepare for death, for I think that but a short time remains for us on earth."

In fact for what could they hope? At the death of their father, Edward IV., the duke of Gloucester had, at first, expressed for his royal nephew a sincere affection and devotion. He had himself conducted him to London; and bareheaded by his side, out of respect to the superior rank of his nephew, had shown him to the citizens, who received him with enthusiastic acclamations. At the same time, however, he separated the prince from his most faithful servants, whom he caused to be arrested and put to death; he had removed him from his mother, and for a month the prince had been retained in the Tower of London, where no one was allowed to approach him. Now, Richard was equally in Gloucester's power. Audacity sufficed to put him in possession of a crown which he had coveted so long and so earnestly; it was known that he shrunk from no obstacle, that he was by no means one of those "*who let I dare not wait upon I would.*" In the mean while Richard recalled to his brother the caresses of their uncle, the respect which he had shown them, the protection of their mother, who would not abandon them, and who would never have confided them to Gloucester had she doubted his loyalty; and at this remembrance their hearts were moved.

"Reassure thyself, Edward. I have a presentiment that the day of thy coronation lingers not, and

hold! to-day even, in going out from Westminster in traversing London, I have seen preparations for rejoicings. It is for thee, I am certain; and if our uncle has brought me hither, it is in order that I may assist at thy coronation, as thy brother should."

They were amusing themselves from day to day with these gay hopes, when suddenly London rang with the sound of bells, the noise of cannon awoke the silent echoes of the Tower, and in the distance were heard the joyous acclamations of the people.

"Said I not so, Edward? Is it not thy coronation they announce? To-morrow we shall enter Westminster in triumph. Long live Edward the Fifth!" continued the young prince, approaching the window with his brother.

"Long live King Richard the Third!" replied the people, whose mighty voice drowned the noise of the Thames, and the solemn sounds that filled the air.

"Hearest thou that, Richard? hearest thou that? It is not my name that the people proclaim." And he strove to climb up to the window, the better to understand the words that were shouted by the crowd.

"Long live King Richard the Third! Glory and long life to Richard the Third!"

Night enveloped with its thick pall the city of London; heavy clouds, through which distant lightning occasionally flashed in silence, gathered over the city; the air was oppressive, and charged with those sulphureous vapours which announce the tempest. The waves of the Thames, dashing against the walls of the tower, and on its banks, alone interrupted the profound but terrible calm which reigned in the obscurity. It was August, and two months had the children of Edward the Fourth been apparently forgotten by King Richard the Third. After a day passed, as usual, without novelty, night had surprised the two princes, still conversing of their mother, and of the happiest days of their childhood. Richard still hoped; his gayety, his ignorance of care, resisted captivity; but Edward, tormented by incessant terrors, partook not of the confidence of his brother, and it was a melancholy spectacle to see this child, subdued by misfortunes, and pressed down by disquietude, involuntarily bow his pale face, and languish. Exhausted by the extreme heat of this day, they had thrown themselves on the couch, and slept in each other's arms. As they thus reposed, they appeared to wish to protect each other. Beside them was a crucifix, which attested that before retiring they had engaged in devotions. A book of prayers, richly ornamented in the style of the manuscripts of that period, lay half open near them. They reposed, and the lamp that each evening was lighted in the chamber, threw but a few feeble beams upon the hangings of their bed.

They slept; and, doubtless, Heaven, to calm the fears which pursued them during the day, had sent them pleasant dreams; they, perhaps, again were enjoying the time when, free and happy, the nobi-

lity of England, Gloucester at their head, bowed before their childhood; they once more traversed the great park of Windsor, where they had essayed their first steps. Edward heard the joyous cries that welcomed him at his entrance into London, when, covered by the royal mantle, he had received the homage of the lord mayor, the aldermen and the citizens who pressed around him; he smiled at the past, and the present was forgotten.

At this moment the door of their chamber opened softly, and two men, entering with precaution, approached their bed. At the sight of such calm and youthful innocence they hesitated; one of them forcibly thrust back the poignard which he had drawn, and they contemplated in silence that sweet slumber. Finally, after a moment's hesitation, he who had at first been affected by the touching picture, regained his bloody resolution, and said in a whisper—

“Come, we must finish; Richard wishes it, and thou knowest, Forest, none can resist him.”

“What! hast thou the courage, Tyrrel? Darest thou strike?”

“Can I brave the anger of the king?”

“But this blood, Tyrrel, this blood. It is that of Edward the Fourth—they are the nephews of Richard. And if he should repent”—

“What matters it! He commands, I obey.” And he seized his dagger, but his firmness again gave way.

The storm which had long threatened, now announced itself by a thunder crash. The brothers were awakened, and surprised, they viewed the assassins. Edward saw the danger.

“Ah! my brother,” said he to Richard, “they come to kill us.”

The poignard of Tyrrel glanced on the breast of the duke of York; as he died, Edward, pushing back the arm of the murderer, said—

“Why do you kill my brother? Take my life, and let him live.”

“Oh! no, no more blood; let me not hear their cries,” wildly exclaimed Tyrrel, and seizing a pillow he tried to extinguish their voices. Finally, with his whole strength, he succeeded, and their inanimate bodies remained upon the bed. Then the mighty sound of thunder, and the rain, which beat the windows with violence, alone disturbed the silence of that chamber of death. The children of Edward were dead, and the house of York stained with its blood for the last time, the red rose, the symbol of so many civil wars.